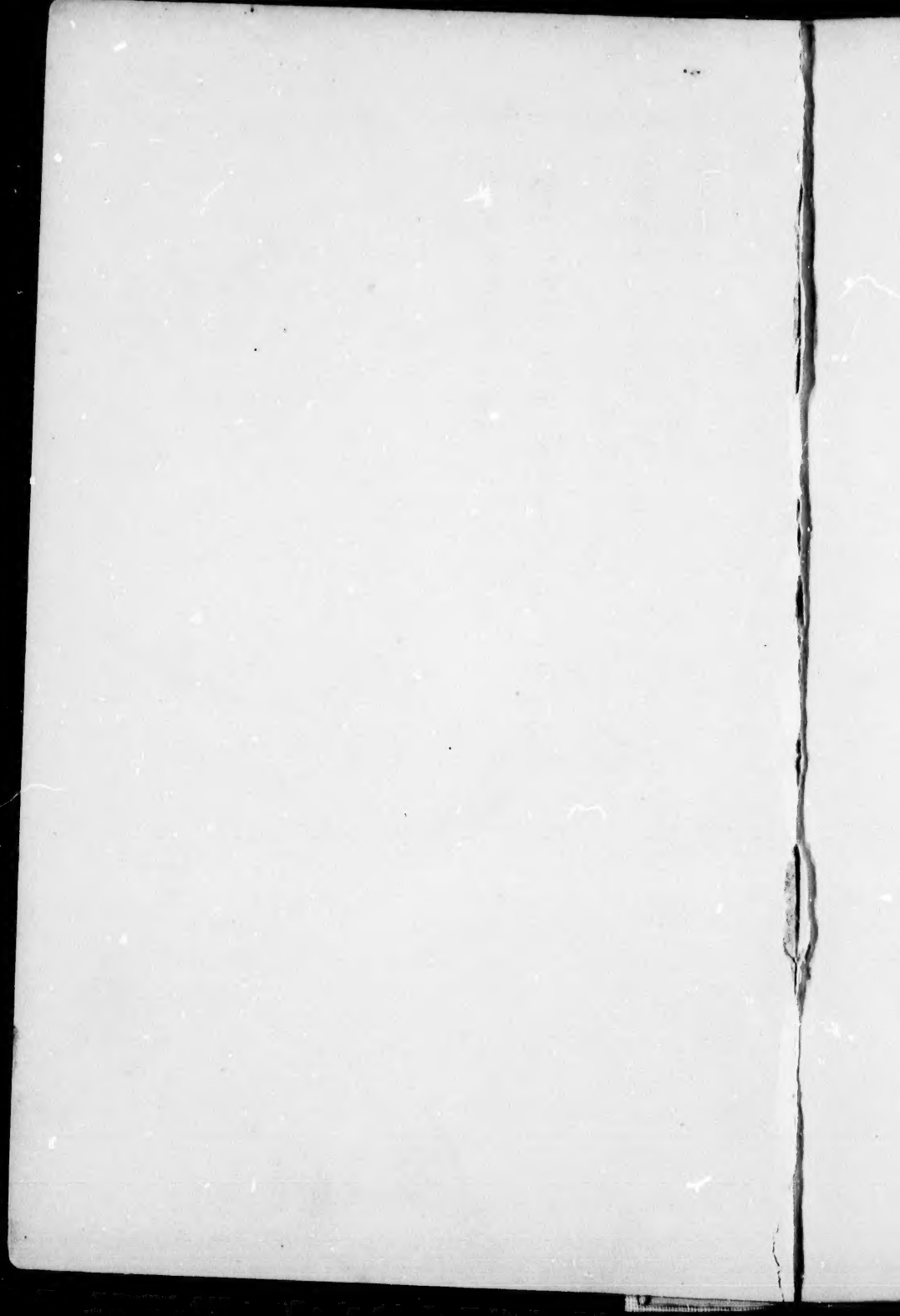


A SERMON
ON
PREDESTINATION.

BY REV. JAMES BRECKENRIDGE
STREETSVILLE, ONT.



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1872.



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NOTE.

The following Sermon was not delivered at one time, but on **THREE** successive Sabbaths, with appropriate introduction and application. It is here represented as **ONE**, so as to preserve the continuity of the Discourse.

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PREDESTINATION.

“For to do whatsoever Thy hand and Thy counsel determined before to be done.”—ACTS iv. 28.

THE subject to which I wish to direct your attention this morning is Predestination—one of the most profound, intricate, and mysterious subjects which can engage the attention of men. It is not often, indeed, that this specific subject is taken up in the pulpit, and for good reason. There are many other subjects which are far more within our reach,—more level to our capacities, and of more practical importance in their bearing upon our everyday Christian life than this subject can be, and these may therefore be, as a rule, more profitable; but if this be a part of the truth of God—as undoubtedly it is—then we are not at liberty to ignore it, for we are to declare the whole counsel of God. If it were not intended to serve some good purpose, it would form no part of Revelation. Nor can we overlook the fact, that it is scarcely possible for men who think at all, to avoid thinking on this subject, and few

there are indeed who escape being perplexed by it; and there is no small danger—especially on the part of young minds—of indulging in rash and unwarrantable speculation on this and kindred questions. It may be well, therefore, at times, to set forth clearly what Scripture teaches on the subject, so as to guard the young against rash and dangerous speculation, and direct the minds of the thoughtful and inquiring in the way of truth. But I must remind you at the outset, that we must not expect to be able to solve all difficulties, for some of these are insolvable, and must ever remain so, unless God should give us new faculties, or a further Revelation; and perhaps not even then, for the subject has relation to the purposes of the Divine mind, and the finite can never comprehend the Infinite; yet, by the Divine blessing, and the guidance of God's Spirit, it is not only possible, but it is our duty to ascertain what Scripture teaches in regard to it, and what may be legitimately inferred from the nature and perfections of God, as revealed to us in the Scriptures.

The event referred to in the text is the most important that has ever happened, or ever will happen in our world; an event upon which the whole history of the world hinges; it is the fundamental fact of our common Christianity, the central truth of the Revelation God has given us. It is not my intention to speak at present of that event, however important it may be, but of the statement made regarding it, viz.: that it was predetermined, purposed, foreordained, or predes-

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tinated, for this is the evident meaning of the statement, that "both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel were gathered together, *for to do whatsoever Thy hand and Thy counsel determined before to be done.*" God's "hand" is His power—His power accomplishing; and His "counsel" is His will or wisdom determining; so that the different parties mentioned in the text, while carrying out their own intentions, and doing according to their own will, were at the same time accomplishing what God had before determined should be accomplished. This is the plain and obvious meaning of the statement; and indeed it can have no other meaning; and this is not the only passage in which the same thing is asserted, in language equally explicit. In the 2nd chap. and 23rd verse of this same book we read, "Him being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain." If, therefore, the death of Christ was predetermined, or foreordained, so also the time of his death, the manner of it, and the agents by whom it was to be effected,—for we cannot separate these,—they constitute one whole, and the statement of the text has reference to the whole. The question then naturally arises, Is what is here affirmed of the death of Christ, viz. : that it was foreordained, true only of that event? Or is it true only of some events, such as are foretold in prophecy? Or is it true of all events whatever? The doctrine of our Church is, and I apprehend the doctrine of the Bible

is, that it is true of all events whatsoever; and it will be the aim of this Discourse to establish and illustrate this truth, which is thus set forth in our Shorter Catechism, "The Decrees of God are His eternal purpose, according to the counsel of His will, whereby for His own glory, He hath foreordained whatsoever comes to pass."

In further consideration of this subject, I shall endeavour to illustrate the following topics :—

- I. God has a plan or purpose in first projecting, and then in directing the affairs of the universe.
- II. God's plan or purpose is one, embracing all events whatsoever, in their causes, conditions, circumstances, and relations.
- III. God's plan or purpose is a sovereign, absolute, most wise and holy, eternal, and unchangeable purpose.
- IV. That plan or purpose God executes, either efficaciously or permissively.
- V. The accomplishment of that purpose does not make God the author of sin, does not interfere with the liberty of free agents, does not destroy human responsibility, and does not discourage the use of means.

The development and illustration of these few propositions will cover the whole field of our present inquiry. The several points must of necessity be touched very briefly.

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I. GOD HAS A PLAN OR PURPOSE IN FIRST PROJECTING, AND THEN IN CONDUCTING THE AFFAIRS OF THE UNIVERSE.

(1.) *This must be the case from His nature as an intelligent, wise, and powerful Being.*

The supposition of a plan implies two things, viz: a definite end to be accomplished, and the selection of means for the accomplishment of that end. Now, it is of the very nature of an intelligent being to have a plan—to have in view a definite end to be accomplished, and to employ means for the accomplishment of that end. This is one thing which distinguishes man from the irrational creatures by which he is surrounded in this world—he is capable of forming some definite purpose in reference to the future, and of putting means in operation for the attainment of that end. And the more wise, intelligent, and powerful the man is, the more likely he is to have some definite purpose in view; the more wisely his plan will be laid, the more appropriate will be the means he will employ for the attainment of his end; and the more unswervingly he will adhere to his plan. On the other hand, where man ceases to have any plan, or any aim or purpose in anything he does, he ceases to be rational.

Now, God is an infinitely wise, and intelligent Being, it therefore belongs to His very nature, as such, to have some definite purpose in view, and to employ means for the attainment of that purpose; that is, to act in accordance with some plan. When, therefore, God created the

universe, it was with some definite end in view; and undoubtedly it is so constituted as to attain that end; it is just such a universe as He designed it in His wisdom to be. And although we are incapable of seeing in what respects it is adapted to the purpose intended, yet we may have a glimpse of the same. When we lift up our eyes to the starry frame, all seems at first sight to be inextricable confusion; and to the uneducated eye it may so continue; but the science of astronomy—imperfect as it is—assures us, that all is order, beauty, harmony;—that the multitudes of the heavenly bodies are arranged in groups or systems; that the secondary planets revolve around the primary, and the primary around a central sun, and perhaps many suns and systems revolve around some more important centre, and the whole, it may be, around the eternal throne. Hence it is clear, that in the projection and government of the material heavens God had a plan of procedure. So likewise when God created our world, He had some definite end in view, and it is just such a world as He intended it should be.

And when we come to examine the constitution of this earth on which we dwell, we cannot suppose that it was by mere accident that it consists of mountains, valleys, lakes, seas, and rivers; we cannot think that it was mere accident that determined the relative proportions of land and water, the various strata of fossiliferous or azoic rocks and metallic veins, composing the earth's crust, or the constituent elements, and combining proportions of the atmosphere by which the earth is sur-

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rounded; for if these had been different, the earth would have been unfitted for the abode of sentient beings. Evidently God, who designed to place man upon the earth, determined beforehand all the necessary conditions of a pleasurable existence. Further, God has clothed the earth with herb, tree, fruit, and flower in such rich abundance, that to the uneducated eye, or unthinking mind, it may seem only a wilderness of confusion; but the science of botany instructs us that all these may be arranged into various genera and species, constituted according to some prevailing types, or primordial germs, thus giving abundant evidence of a plan. And so, likewise, of the various tribes of animated existences with which the world is peopled,—these, too, may be arranged into orders or classes, according to certain well-defined characteristics; and even the individual animal follows so closely in its leading features some well-known prototype, that the skilful anatomist can, from a single bone, or fragment of a bone, restore the whole skeleton. Thus we see that in all departments of the physical world God has a plan of procedure, an end to be accomplished, and means employed to attain it. So, when we rise into the higher sphere of God's providential operations in the natural world, or when we contemplate his doings in the moral and spiritual world, can we doubt for a moment that God acts there also according to a determined plan? It would surely be unaccountable, that God should act according to a well-defined plan in the

lower sphere, but not in the higher; that He should pre-arrange everything, and determine everything concerning His irrational creatures, but determine nothing at all for His rational and moral creatures! But both reason and Scripture abundantly testify that God has a purpose with reference to them, and that He worketh all things according to the counsel of His own will.

(2.) *God must have some plan or purpose in all that occurs in our world, else our earth would be without any government, and our world without any Governor.*

If there were no plan in the physical world—as may seem to be the case to the uneducated eye and unthinking mind—then all would be chaos; and if there were no plan in the sphere of God's providential dispensations, or in His doings in the moral and spiritual world, then all would be chaos there also. If there were no overruling, guiding, controlling, Providence, then all would be confusion of the very dreariest kind. There would be nothing certain—all would be chance, fate, darkness, and dismay. There would be no end to be served, and no purpose to be accomplished in any event that would occur, or in any circumstances that might evolve. But it is contrary to our experience, contrary to our observation, contrary to reason, and contrary to Scripture to suppose, that the world is without an intelligent Ruler, who presides over all its affairs, and directs them to the accomplishment of His own purposes.

If, therefore, God has a plan in directing the affairs

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of this world, it follows, that the various events which occur are, *so far*, the interpretation of that plan, or of that part of it which comes within our observation. This is in general true of man—he does what he intended to do, and therefore his actions are the interpretation of his purposes. If he does not do what he intended, it is because he has not power to carry out his intentions ; or because his plan, not being formed in wisdom, he discovers that something else would be better ; or because of some new knowledge gained, he sees that it would be better not to carry out his intentions ; or because of some sudden and unexpected turn of circumstances, he is surprised into doing what he did not intend to do. It is easy to see that if he had sufficient power, wisdom, knowledge, and foresight, his acts would in all cases be the interpretation of his purposes. But God is all-wise, all-powerful ; there can be no addition to His knowledge, no surprise to His wisdom, and no resistance to His power ; events must, therefore, be the interpretation of His purposes. Whatever happens, He intended should happen, or purposed to permit it to happen. If, therefore, some die in infancy, and others live to old age ; if some are highly gifted and endowed, and others are deficient ; if some are happy, and others miserable ; if some are prosperous, and others unfortunate ; if some seasons are fruitful, and others the reverse, it is all of His appointment ; it all entered into His plan ; it all formed part of His all-wise purpose. It is clear then, that God has a plan or purpose, in

first projecting, and then in directing the affairs of the universe.

II. GOD'S PLAN OR PURPOSE IS ONE, EMBRACING ALL
EVENTS IN THEIR CAUSES, CONDITIONS, CIRCUM-
STANCES, AND RELATIONS.

We often speak of God's purposes or decrees, because His purpose or plan consists of various parts, and our attention is directed to one part at a time ; our attention is fixed on one thing, circumstance, or event. This is necessarily the case, for our finite minds are incapable of comprehending the whole—of taking in all God's plan. Hence a very fruitful source of error. Nearly all the errors into which men fall in connection with this subject, is by considering one event apart from the connection in which it stands—by isolating it from the great chain of events constituting the one great purpose of Jehovah. Just the same error in kind that a man should make, in judging of the purpose to be served by some complicated machine, by considering one part or fragment of it. What could he possibly know of the perfect adaptation of the machine to the purpose intended, from one single wheel or pinion of it? Much less can a man judge of the one great purpose of Jehovah, or discover the wisdom of His plan, by considering one isolated part of it. We must ever bear in mind, therefore, that God's plan or purpose is one, and the infinite Mind alone is capable of comprehending the whole.

(1.) *God's plan or purpose is one, for events are so connected in the great chain of Providence, that the determining of one determines all.*

No event stands alone : it has causes and results, antecedents and consequents, which can neither be traced to their origin, nor followed to their ultimate issue. One single event is one link in the great chain of Providence, and if that one is fixed, all is fixed ; if that is uncertain, all is uncertain. Take, for example, the event in the text ; it has antecedents running up to the very beginning of time, and consequents reaching down to the very end of it, and even beyond it. It is evident, therefore, that that single event, in all its circumstances and relations, covers all time ; it involves the whole previous, and the whole subsequent history of the world ; and the determining of that one event determines the whole. It is of no use to say, that the *fact* of Christ's death might be determined, but not the circumstances and relations, for these things cannot be separated ; they are part of the fact itself. If it was determined that Christ should die, that also determined the mode of his death ; for though you may separate these two things in thought, as you may separate two parts of one whole, or two links of one chain, they are joined in reality ; and so, also, with the actions of free agents acting freely in connection with this event, for these are conjoined in the same manner. And what we thus conclude to be so from the nature of the case, we find to be so in reality, from the testimony of Scrip-

ture ; for all these things were foretold by the prophets and therefore certain ; and certain, because they were predetermined. And in harmony with this view is the statement of the text, which has reference, not merely to the fact of Christ's death, but the circumstances of it. What is thus true of the death of Christ, is true of any one event ; it is determined in all its circumstances and conditions, so that God's purpose or plan is one, comprehending many parts, and involving many relations.

(2.) *If God's plan does not embrace all events, then there must be some events which are beyond his control.*

If there are any events not included in His plan, these must be beyond His control ; and if beyond His control, then they may frustrate some part of His plan, and defeat some part of His purpose. If, for example, the action of Judas, who betrayed our Lord, and the actions of the chief priests, who condemned Him, were beyond His control, it is obvious that Christ might not have died at all. But, if there are any actions of intelligent beings which are beyond Divine control, we may well ask, What are they ? Where have we an account of them ? Where are they defined ? Of what character are they ? But there are no such actions, and cannot be. It would be contrary to reason, contrary to observation, contrary to all we know of the Divine perfections, contrary to the plain testimony of Scripture, that there should be any actions beyond God's control. " He doeth according to His will in the army of heaven, and among

the inhabitants of the earth, and none can stay His hand, or say unto Him, What doest Thou?" "The Lord reigneth, let the earth rejoice; let the multitude of the isles be glad thereof."

If, therefore, God's plan or purpose is one, it must embrace what is evil as well as what is good. If the various events which occur are to be taken as the interpretation of God's purposes, this must be the case. It is of no use arguing against facts. It is a wrong mode of arguing altogether, to start from any particular assumption, and from that determine what must be, and what can not be. The rational mode of procedure is to gather up the facts of the case, and from these facts ascertain, if possible, the principle involved, or determine the law by which they are regulated. This is the mode which the man of science pursues; he first ascertains his facts, and from them constructs his theory; and if he should be wrong in his inferences, as is sometimes the case, it will be found that he has made an imperfect induction of facts, or is illogical in his reasoning. The same mode of procedure is the only safe one in dealing with Scripture truths, and the facts of our religious experience, viz.: to take the separate truths and facts as they stand, and construct our system from them, instead of first constructing our system, and then straining our facts to bring them into harmony with it. If we should start from the admitted truth, that God is a holy, wise, and powerful Being, sovereign and independent, infinite in

goodness and in truth, having all things, whatsoever under His control, and if we should conclude from this, that sin could have no place in His dominions, we would undoubtedly be wrong, for sin *has* a place in His dominions. If we should argue from the divine goodness, truth, and holiness, that sin could not enter into His plan of the universe, this would be disproved by the fact, that sin *does* enter into His plan. We must admit—unless we deny the Divine perfections altogether—that God could have prevented sin from entering into our world, or from having a place in any part of His dominions, if it so pleased Him; and if He has not prevented, He must have permitted. For some wise purpose, no doubt; for some reason known only to Himself—for He has not seen fit to reveal it to us—God has permitted sin to enter into, and form part of His plan. Thus the fruits or manifestations of sin—the evil deeds of men, the vices of His intelligent, moral creatures; God, for wise reasons, has determined to permit these. We must assume here, also, that He could have prevented these if He pleased, else they are altogether beyond His control. There is no other possible alternative in the case. He must either have permitted, or He had no power to prevent. We cannot take the latter alternative; they are not beyond His control, for He restrains them, and overrules them for good. “Surely the wrath of man shall praise Thee, the remainder of wrath Thou shalt restrain;” and if He restrains, He could prevent. It must therefore be

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part of His purpose or plan to allow these, or not to put forth His power to prevent them. There is no more difficulty with these, than with the existence of sin in the world at all. The existence of sin is a difficulty—a difficulty that all have felt—a difficulty which is the parent of all other difficulties, for it will be found that all other difficulties in religious questions run up at last into this—a difficulty that is unsolvable, and must ever remain so in this world; it is, in short, a deep and awful mystery, overshadowing our whole being; and it is a difficulty, too, from which no theological system whatever will give us any relief; for it cannot be modified, even in the smallest degree, by any view we may take of the question we are now considering. The difficulty lies in the fact itself, and not in any particular view of it; and it is perfectly obvious, that no way of viewing the fact will give any relief, while the fact itself remains. There is no possible escape from the difficulty, but by running into a far greater, viz.: by supposing, that God had not power to prevent it. The wise thing for us is, in all humility and reverence to accept this great mystery, assured that the existence of sin is not inconsistent with the Divine goodness, wisdom, and holiness, though we may not be able to see how; that He will overrule it for good; and that in some way or other it will advance the Divine glory.

III. GOD'S PURPOSE IS A SOVEREIGN, ABSOLUTE, MOST WISE AND HOLY, ETERNAL, AND UNCHANGEABLE PURPOSE.

These are what are usually called the properties of the Divine decrees; and it is about these properties, and not about the decrees themselves, that men chiefly differ.

(1.) *God's purpose is a sovereign purpose, that is, He purposes as he pleases; or, as the Scripture expresses it, He "worketh all things after the counsel of His own will."*

We are ready to admit that as the Creator, Preserver, and Proprietor of all material things, He has a sovereign right to do with them as he pleases; and He has precisely the same right, and to the same extent, over His intelligent moral creatures, and for the very same reason. And we find from the Scriptures that He claims this right: "Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour?" And not only does He claim this right, but He acts upon it, He exercises it. "Jacob have I loved, and Esau have I hated." The Apostle puts this as clearly as words can put it, when he says: "For the children, being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of Him that calleth, it was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger." When we say that

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God's purpose is a sovereign purpose, we do not mean that God acts arbitrarily, or without reasons. In all that He does He acts in accordance with His own glorious perfections, and has no doubt good reasons for what He does; but these reasons have no reference to the creature, but are found in the perfections of his own nature, and are unrevealed to us. He gives account of His doings to none. So far as the creature is concerned His purpose is a sovereign purpose. This is clear from the example referred to of Jacob and Esau; and it is clear, also, from the passage already quoted, that "He worketh all things after the counsel of His own will." And this is the only view that is consistent with known facts, or adequate to account for them. If we should start with the assumption, that God being just, He must deal with every man alike, and distribute His favours equally to all, we would be undoubtedly wrong, for this is far from being the case. It is a fact that inequalities, and great inequalities, exist among men. Some are more highly favoured than others, not only in temporal but in spiritual matters. This is true of nations and races of men. Will any one affirm that those brought up in the midst of heathenism are as favourably situated as those brought up in Christian lands? Was not the Jewish nation more highly favoured of old than any other nation on the face of the earth? "What advantage then hath the Jew? much every way." So it is with individual men. One man enjoys good health all his lifetime, another

has constant sickness ; one is rich, another poor ; one is prosperous, another unfortunate ; one is gifted, another deficient in abilities ; one is born with amiable qualities and dispositions, another with the reverse ; one is brought up in a religious home and trained in the ways of godliness, another is brought up in ignorance and trained in crime. Can any man say why he lives now and not a thousand years ago ? or why he has been born in a Christian land and not in the heart of heathen Africa ? It is God who has determined our lot, and who has appointed the bounds of our habitation that we may not pass, and in so doing, He has acted according to His own good will and pleasure. All we can say about it is, " Even so Father, for so it seemed good in Thy sight." It does not follow from this, however, that God's sovereignty is at variance with His justice in thus dealing with men. What may seem to our limited view to be partiality or injustice, may not be so to Him who takes in the whole of man's existence, and in arranging the plan of the universe, appointed him his lot and portion in this world. " Shall not the judge of all the earth do right."

(2.) *The purpose of God is absolute and unconditional.*

I do not mean here, that the purpose of God has no condition connected with it, or that no condition enters into His plan ; but I mean, that God's purpose depends upon no condition out of Himself ; the original determination of His purpose, is founded upon nothing outside of the Divine mind ; the ground or reasons of

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God's purpose are to be sought for, not in the creature, but in God Himself, in His own holy and righteous will. If God's purpose were conditioned upon man, or upon the mere will of the creature, then the accomplishment of that purpose would evidently be uncertain. If the will of man, absolutely independent of any Divine control, should in every case in which the actions of men are concerned, be allowed to turn the scale, then it is clear, that God could have no definite purpose at all, in regard to anything in which man is concerned as an agent, for there would be nothing certain. If, for example, the death of Christ was conditioned solely upon the will of Judas, who betrayed Him, or of the chief priests, who condemned Him, then it is evident that His death would be uncertain; but there was no uncertainty about it, for it was God's own "hand and counsel" which determined the event. And further, if God's purpose were conditioned upon man, or upon the will of man, it would make God dependent upon His creatures. In that case, the action of man would limit, determine, or prevent the purpose of God, and give character and shape to the Divine procedure; but, surely this is contrary to all that sovereignty and independence, which reason and Scripture alike ascribe to the Deity. God's purpose often does embrace a condition, His plan often makes provision for a condition, and the event is often determined in such a connection; but God's decree is not suspended upon such a condition, but is in itself abso-

lute and unconditional. Take, for example, the shipwreck of St. Paul. Here God determined to save the lives of all who were with Paul in the ship, and announced His intention so to do. Now, this was an absolute, unconditional purpose to save these men, for there was no uncertainty whatever about it; yet there was a condition in connection with that purpose to save these men, and that condition was, that they would remain in the ship. But there was no uncertainty about this condition; it was just as certain that they would remain in the ship, and that means would be found to keep them in the ship, as that they would be saved. In truth, the condition that they should remain in the ship was part of the purpose to save these men; and the determining of the one thing, determined the whole conditions necessary to the accomplishment of the design; but the purpose to save these men at all, was evidently founded upon reasons in the Divine Mind alone, and was absolutely certain of accomplishment. Thus we see that the purpose of God, embracing all causes and conditions, is an absolute and unconditional purpose.

(3.) *The purpose of God is a most wise and holy purpose.*

Whatever God designs to do, is in harmony with His own most glorious perfections; for He must ever act in accordance with His own nature. "The Lord is righteous in all His ways, and holy in all His works." Though, for wise reasons, He may permit what is evil

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to enter into His plan, yet His own purpose is a most holy purpose. That holiness, which is the crown and glory of the godhead, is not tarnished by anything at variance in the divine decrees, or in the mode of executing them. And not only is God's purpose a holy purpose, but Jehovah's plan is in harmony with infinite wisdom. All the parts thereof, all the conditions and relations, all the times and circumstances, are in harmony with the highest wisdom. The means which He employs for the accomplishment of His purpose are the very best that could be employed for attaining the end in view. Out of infinite resources, infinite wisdom chooses that which is most meet, and that which most perfectly fulfils the required conditions. No mistakes are made, and no failure can occur from an ill-devised plan, or from an improper selection of means to carry it out. The means employed may not be the best for promoting the happiness of the creature whose interests are involved in the accomplishment of God's plan—although for our comfort we are assured that all things work together for good to them that love Him—because the happiness of the creature is not the end that God has in view, at least not the highest end. As far as we can learn from the Scriptures, the highest end is His own glory; "the Lord hath made all things for Himself," which we may well believe to be consistent with the greatest amount of happiness to the universe at large; and we may be sure that the course of His procedure is the best adapted to secure this. Not being

capable of comprehending the whole plan, or of observing all the parts of it, it is evident, that we are no judges of the wisdom of it; and looking at a very small part of it, we may think it the very reverse of wisdom, and yet it may be the very highest wisdom. And trusting Him as loving children, even when we cannot see, we will ever be ready to acknowledge "He doeth all things well;" or to say with pious Job "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him." Even the deepest and the darkest dispensations may yet be manifested wisdom, and His purpose be seen to be a wise and holy purpose.

(4.) *God's purpose is an eternal purpose.*

By this we understand, that what He does, He always intended to do. His purpose was not formed in time, as the result of certain developments, and circumstances that have evolved in the revolution of the ages, but was formed before time began to run. This must be the case from the very nature of God as an infinite Being. With Him there is no past, present, nor future, but all is one eternal now. What occurs to our view in successive periods of time, was ever present to His mind. Though future to us, nothing can be future to Him. His omniscient glance takes in at one view all time. There can be no surprise to His wisdom and no resistance to His power; and hence there will be no occasion to change that purpose which He had once formed. That this purpose was formed from eternity, we have the most ample Scripture testimony.

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In Acts xv. 18 it is said, "Known unto God are all His works from *the beginning of the world*;" or as the last clause might be rendered, *from eternity*. In Matt. xxv., the "kingdom" is said to be prepared for the righteous "from the *foundation of the world*," which evidently means, before all time. In Eph. i. 4 we are said to be chosen in Him *before the foundation of the world*. These and similar expressions evidently denote, that the purpose of God in reference to all things whatsoever, was formed from eternity. And in confirmation of this view, it is expressly called in Scripture, his *eternal* purpose, Eph. iii. 1, "According to the eternal purpose which He purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord."

(5.) *That plan or purpose is an unchangeable purpose.*

This directly follows from the fact, that it is an eternal purpose; that which is eternally the same, is of course unchangeable. This indeed we are warranted to infer from the nature and perfections of God, viz; that His purposes would be unchangeable. God himself changeth not. With Him there is no variableness, neither shadow of turning. It is different with man; he is a changeable being, and his purposes change also. The reason for this change of purpose in man is not far to seek. Man's knowledge and foresight are very imperfect, his wisdom defective, his power limited; and hence from actual experience of the folly of his plan, or from lack of power to carry it out, he is often under the necessity of changing it; but if he were perfect in wisdom and knowledge, he would be under no such necessity.

A change of purpose argues imperfection in him who forms it. But God is under no such necessity to change His purpose; there is in Him no such defect in wisdom or knowledge, and no lack of power to accomplish His design; and hence we have reason to suppose, that His purpose never will be changed. To this point also we have the most explicit testimony of Scripture. Job xxiii. 13-14: "But He is in one mind and who can turn Him." "For He performeth the thing that is appointed for me." And in Isaiah xli. 9, 10: "I am God and there is none like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand and I shall do all My pleasure." Equally explicit is the statement in Mal. iii. 6, "I am the Lord, I change not." There are some things in the Scriptures, it is true, apparently at variance with these passages, but they admit of an easy explanation. In several places the Bible speaks of God "repenting Him" of the evil; which would seem to indicate a change of purpose on the part of God, consequent on the repentance of the people. Thus Jonah denounced against Nineveh, "Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown," and then we read, "And God saw their works that they turned from their evil way, and God repented of the evil that He said He would do unto them, and He did it not." On the principle already laid down, of interpreting God's purpose by the event—that what He does He always intended to do, it was evidently the purpose of God from the beginning,

that the denunciation of the divine judgments by His prophet, should lead the Ninnevites to repentance, and upon their repentance to spare them from the threatened punishment. The only difficulty in the case is the apparent *absolute* denunciation of God's judgment on the guilty city; that He positively threatened, but did not inflict the punishment threatened. This difficulty is the same on any system, and perhaps can be best explained in this way. It is not unwarrantable to assume, that the people were acquainted with the truth so often proclaimed to God's people, and not unknown even to idolators, that a timely repentance *may* save from impending ruin. It is but fair to infer that they knew this truth, since they acted on it; and if we suppose this to be implied, then the threatened judgment would not be absolute, but accompanied with a condition, implied though not expressed, which God purposed should be fulfilled. In other words, the purpose to spare the Ninnevites was absolute, but the threatened judgment was conditional. The case of Hezekiah is to be explained on the same principle. God sent His prophet to him with this message, "Set thine house in order for thou shalt die and not live." The disease with which Hezekiah was afflicted was naturally fatal, and would be so, unless God would interpose on his behalf. But Hezekiah well understood that true repentance *might* avert the threatened calamity, and hence he humbled himself before God. But God purposed from the beginning, that the delivery of such a startling message should

bring him to deep humiliation and prayer ; and in answer to his prayer, He purposed to heal his disease, and add fifteen years to his life.

“ Thus while we humbly own the vast decree,
 Formed in the bosom of eternity,
 And know all secondary causes tend,
 Each to contribute to one mighty end ;
 And while these causes firmly fixed remain,
 Links quite unbroken in the endless chain,
 So that should one be snapped, the whole must fail,
 And wide confusion o'er the world prevail ;
 Why may not our petitions which arise,
 In humble adoration to the skies,
 Be foreordained the causes whence shall flow
 Our purest pleasures in this vale of woe ?
 Not that they move the purpose that hath stood
 By time unchanged, unmeasurably good,
*But that th' event and prayer alike may be
 United objects of the same decree.”*

IV. GOD EXECUTES HIS PLAN, OR ACCOMPLISHES HIS PURPOSE, EITHER EFFICACIOUSLY OR PERMISSIVELY.

We may distinguish two ways in which God executes His purposes.

(1.) *Directly.* It is in this way that God accomplishes His purpose in the work of creation—in the creation of new worlds, and new races ; in the creation of the soul of man, and in creating it anew in to Christ Jesus unto good works. In the work of creation there is a direct forth-putting of divine power, and God alone

is the efficient agent. So also in preserving and upholding all things which He has made. In this case also, we suppose, that there is a direct forth-putting of a divine influence, for "He upholdeth all things by the word of His power." The miracles of Christ will come under this head, for they were divine works. The restoring of a withered arm, or the opening of blind eyes, was a creative act, and the raising of the dead, was a divine work. For anything we know, there *may* be works of this kind done in the world now—there may be cases, in which there is a direct forth-putting of divine power, to heal, or to deliver men, for God is not restricted in His mode of working. This will be the case at the last day, when those, who shall have been alive at His coming, will be changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, and the dead shall be raised. Those cases in which God is the direct and sole agent, present no difficulty, for no evil enters into the results.

(2.) *Indirectly.* Here we may distinguish two ways in which God indirectly accomplishes his purposes, (a) By the use of means, or through the instrumentality of second causes.

This is the ordinary way in which God accomplishes His purposes in this world. In this way He illumines our world; not directly, as he does in heaven, where He is Himself the light; but by placing the sun to rule the day, and the moon to rule the night. Various causes combine in producing fruitful seasons—the active properties of the seed, the nature of the soil, the agency

of man, the genial sun, and the rain from heaven in its season. Almost everything within the sphere of our observation and experience is accomplished through the instrumentality of second causes. All that is most dear to us, prosperity or adversity, health or sickness, life or death is thus effected. God has endowed the various substances of earth, air, and sea, with certain properties or qualities, and these several elements so endowed, act in their sphere efficiently as second causes, producing in most cases, well known results. These various elements with their intrinsic properties, are so adjusted in their relations and proportions, that their concurrent action proceeds according to a general law, which we usually call, a law of nature. In His ordinary providence, God does not interfere with this law of nature, which is of His own appointment; He does not alter nor destroy those properties with which He has endowed the various substances constituting this earth; nor as a rule, does He nullify their action; yet it would be a very shallow and superficial view of material phenomena to suppose, that because of these secondary causes, God could not accomplish His own purposes; as if there could be no great First Cause behind, above, and beyond all these! It is evident, that since God at first endowed all these elements with their respective properties, and adjusted all their proportions, He might from the very beginning, so adjust His plan, that these second causes, acting according to their own nature, might accomplish in the various revo-

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lutions of time, the very purpose which He intended they should accomplish; and thus, what seems to us to be mere accident, will be as much a part of His plan, as those things which fall out in the ordinary course of His providence; or the truth on this point is more likely to be, that by His all wise and powerful control of these elements in their action, without destroying their natural properties, or contravening the law of nature, He determines all results whatsoever, and thus most surely accomplishes His own purposes, and does the thing that pleases Him.* This seems to be the Scriptural view of God's relation to the world, when it informs us, that the hairs of our head are numbered, and that a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without our heavenly Father. If God has not such a control as this over all the powers and principles of nature, providence would have no meaning, and prayer would in many cases be a mockery and pretence.

(*b.*) Another way in which God indirectly accomplishes His purposes is by the free will of intelligent agents.

In this sense He effects His purpose, in regard at least to what involves evil, permissively. There are just two possible alternatives here, and only two. We must either admit that God can accomplish his purpose in this way, viz.: by the instrumentality of free agents acting freely, or we must maintain, that He cannot accomplish anything in which the actions of free agents are concerned. But we have abundant evidence that

God does accomplish His own purpose in cases in which the actions of free agents are concerned. Many events are foretold in prophecy, depending for their fulfilment upon the actions of men, acting freely, and yet these prophecies have been fulfilled; and many other events are in like manner foretold in prophecy, involving in their fulfilment the actions of many men, acting according to their own free will, and they too will in due time be accomplished; for one jot, or one tittle shall in no wise pass away, till all be fulfilled. Prophetical events are absolutely certain of accomplishment; and certain, because God has determined to accomplish them in no other way, but through the instrumentality of men acting according to their own free will. Nearly all prophetical events are of this description. Men follow the bent of their own inclinations, they act according to their own will, and yet they are at the same time accomplishing none the less, God's purpose. Of this kind is the event in the text. God had foreordained that Christ should die, and that his death should be accomplished through the instrumentality of men acting freely. The Jews followed the bent of their own minds in condemning Christ, and at the same time, they were only doing what "His hand and His counsel determined before to be done." And if God could accomplish His purpose in that case, through the instrumentality of men acting freely, why not in all other cases? Does not God accomplish His own purpose in reference to nations, by raising up, and qualifying men, who in

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following the bent of their own minds, are nevertheless doing His work? Did not God accomplish the Reformation of the sixteenth century through the instrumentality of Luther and the other Reformers? And does He not accomplish His purpose every day in the same way, and by the very same means, viz.: by men acting according to their own free will? We conclude therefore, that God effects His purpose, either directly, by the forth-putting of His own power; or indirectly, by the instrumentality of means, and the intervention of second causes, or by the free will of intelligent agents; and it does seem to me, that this is the only view of the matter that consists with the facts of the case. I cannot conceive any way in which future events can be foreknown as certain, unless God has determined to effect them in one or other of these ways.

V. THE ACCOMPLISHMENT OF THAT PURPOSE DOES NOT MAKE GOD THE AUTHOR OF SIN, DOES NOT INTERFERE WITH THE LIBERTY OF FREE AGENTS, DOES NOT DESTROY HUMAN RESPONSIBILITY, AND DOES NOT DISCOURAGE THE USE OF MEANS.

These are the standing objections to the view of the doctrine we have been setting forth, and by many are thought to be so strong, as to be fatal to our view of it altogether. Before considering the several points in detail, I would remark first in general, that we are not bound to answer all objections. If the view of the doctrine we have been presenting is sufficiently sustained

by direct Scripture evidence—as I think it is—and by what may fairly be deduced from Scripture teaching, then the doctrine rests upon its own evidence, and stands secure in spite of all objections. But, further, it will be found on examination, that most of the objections urged are really profound mysteries, utterly unsolvable by the human faculties, with the sources of knowledge at our command. And still further, it will be found, that many of the objections so pertinaciously urged against our view of the doctrine, may be urged with equal force against *any* view that may be taken of it. The real difficulty lies in most cases, not with the view we take of the facts, or the principle on which we account for them, but with the facts themselves; and of course the same difficulties will emerge on any theory whatsoever. The difficulties will remain as long as the facts remain. With these preliminary remarks we proceed to consider these points in detail.

(1.) *The view of the doctrine of Predestination we have been setting forth, does not make God the author of sin.*

On this point it is necessary to proceed with caution, and to speak with becoming reverence. The statement of our Confession of Faith is very guarded on this point. “God from all eternity, did, by the most wise and holy counsel of His own will, freely and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass; yet so as hereby neither is God the author of sin, nor is violence offered to the will of the creature, nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather

established.' Of course, there is no difficulty with ordinary events, or with God's agency in accomplishing what is good ; but the difficulty lies in the supposed agency or connection which God has, in accomplishing what is evil. In order to ascertain precisely where the difficulty lies, it will be necessary to enquire more particularly, what is the nature and extent of that agency, or connection, which God has with evil ; for that He has an agency or connection of *some kind*, cannot be questioned. His connection with what is evil, is at least to this extent, that *He permits it* ; that is, He does not interpose to prevent it. This is a plain matter of fact which no one will deny. And then it must be admitted, that His connection with evil goes a little further, viz. : that He controls it, restrains it, sets bounds to it, and overrules it for good. This cannot be denied without denying that God governs the world at all, and contradicting the plainest testimony of Scripture. Here again the words of our Confession are very careful and guarded, "The Almighty power, unsearchable wisdom, and infinite goodness of God, so far manifest themselves in His providence, that it extendeth itself even to the first fall, and all other sins of angels and men ; and that not by a bare permission, but such as hath joined with it a most wise and powerful bounding, and otherwise governing of them in a manifold dispensation, to His own holy ends ; yet so as the sinfulness thereof proceedeth only from the creature, and not from God, who being most holy and

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righteous, neither is, nor can be the author or approver of sin." This is surely not going farther in the matter, than Scripture, and the plain facts of the case warrant, viz.: that God permits evil, and that He controls it. There are some statements of Scripture which would even seem to carry us beyond this point. In Amos iii. 6, it is said, "Shall there be evil in a city, and the Lord hath not done it?" but "evil" in this case no doubt means, not moral evil, but calamity, or judgment for sin. In 2nd Sam. xxiv. 1, we read, "And the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and He moved David against them to say, Go number Israel and Judah." The numbering of the people was a sin for which David was severely punished. Now, it is expressly said, that God moved David to number the people, while in the parallel passage in 1 Chron. it is stated, that Satan provoked David to number the people, so that it is clear that the sin came from David or Satan and not from God; for "God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth He any man;" and yet God had some agency in the matter, although it is impossible for us accurately to determine, how far that agency extended. We are not warranted to put into a definite statement on this point, anything more than is done in our Confession, viz.: that God permits it, and that He overrules and restrains it, so that He is in no way the author, or approver of sin. This will apply to the case of Judas and the chief priests, who betrayed and condemned our Lord. God permitted them so to do, and

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He overruled their wicked deeds, for the accomplishment of His own purpose, and for the good of the world; but the wickedness proceeded from themselves alone. If any difficulty should still be felt with this view of the matter, it is a difficulty from which no other system will give any relief. Supposing we admit the foreknowledge of God—which all at least profess to admit, except a few Socinians—yet deny the doctrine of Predestination as already explained, the case would stand thus. God foreknew that Christ would die; He foreknew that Judas would betray his master; and foreknowing these two things, He created Judas just at that time; He appointed him his lot in that country; and He placed him in such circumstances, that He foreknew he would betray his Lord. A man would surely be devoid of understanding who would say, that that view of the matter removes any difficulty. The truth is, that there is no escape from the difficulty, if any is supposed still to remain, but in the impious supposition, that God had nothing to do with the matter, and knew nothing about it. It is perfectly clear, that whatever difficulty there is in the case, it lies in the facts themselves; so that denying the doctrine of Predestination does not remove a single difficulty, or clear up a single mystery. It is plain therefore, that the doctrine of Predestination, as held by our Church, and as set forth in the Scriptures, does not make God the author of sin; and is no more liable to the charge, than any other view that may be taken.

(2.) *God in the accomplishment of His purpose, does not interfere with the liberty of free agents.*

I need not enter here into any metaphysical discussion concerning the nature of human liberty, but just take it in its ordinary and well understood sense to mean, the liberty of doing as a man pleases. It is a standing reproach against those who hold the doctrine of Predestination, that they destroy human liberty, and reduce man to a mere machine. It is repeatedly and triumphantly asked, how can he help doing what is foreordained that he *shall* do? If this is unanswerable, so also is the following: How can a man help doing what it is absolutely certain that he *will* do? The one question involves the same difficulty, to our understanding, as the other. It was absolutely certain that Judas would betray Christ, for Christ Himself said that he would; how then could he help doing it? There are many things which God knows as absolutely certain that we will do; how then can we help doing them? If we cannot answer one of these questions, neither can we answer the other; so that no greater difficulty is involved in the doctrine of Predestination on this point, than there is in any doctrine on the subject. Our reply to these questions is, that both things are true, viz.: that God has foreordained whatsoever comes to pass, and that man is free; for both things are distinctly and clearly taught in the Scriptures; and all men practically admit, that certainty and liberty are not incompatible; and whatever difficulty there may be in

reconciling these two things, there are far graver difficulties in denying them, or denying any one of them. If, for example, we should assume that it is essential to human freedom, that man should be left absolutely without any controlling influence of any kind, then it must follow, that the actions of men are beyond God's control altogether, or else man is not free. But this is so contrary to Scripture, that no one believes, that the actions of men are beyond God's control. Even those who proclaim most loudly that the doctrine of Predestination destroys human freedom, practically at least admit, that God can control the actions of men without destroying their freedom; for they pray, as right they should, that sin may be restrained, vice subdued, the hearts of men turned to God, sinners converted, and souls saved. The very fact that God is asked to do this, and asked by all denominations of Christians, is an acknowledgement, that the work is a divine work, and that His agency is involved in it, else prayer could have no meaning. But if it should be maintained that God could not thus influence men without destroying their liberty, it is plain, that in order to maintain the freedom of man, their mouth would be shut in prayer altogether. It is clear then that all men admit, practically at least, that God can exert *some* influence over the minds of men, and control the wills of men, without infringing upon human liberty. How this can be the case—how the infinite Spirit can act upon the human spirit, and in some sense at least control its

action, without intrrenching upon that freedom which we all claim, and which we all feel that we enjoy, we cannot understand, much less explain. No human being can explain it, and no one has a right to say that it is impossible; for it rests not only on the testimony of Scripture, but on the facts of our religious experience, which cannot be gainsayed. The will of man previous to conversion, is averse to what is good. Regeneration is admitted by all to be a divine work. The will of the renewed man chooses freely what is good. Here then a divine influence has been exerted upon the man, and yet the man's will is in no way coerced; he acts throughout with perfect freedom. Can any one explain how? "My people shall be willing in the day of My power." Now if we admit that God can in any measure control the actions of men without destroying their freedom, it is perfectly obvious, that He can in any case, accomplish His own purpose, without infringing on the liberty of men; and this is just Predestination as we understand it. That this is the doctrine of the Bible, and the only principle upon which many events can be rationally explained, is clear to any candid reader of the Scriptures. There are many events foretold in Scripture, depending for their accomplishment upon the free action of intelligent agents, some of which have happened, and others are sure to happen, for God has determined their certain futurity; but He has determined their futurity in no other way, than by the agency of men, acting according to their

own free will. On the same principle we maintain, that though the death of Christ was foreordained, Judas and the chief priests acted in the matter with the utmost freedom.

(3.) *The accomplishment of God's purpose does not destroy human responsibility.*

There is no need of saying much on this point. The responsibility of man follows directly from what has been said about the freedom of man, in considering the last point. It is a doctrine of Scripture, and it is a feeling implanted in our very constitution, by our Maker, that we are responsible to God for our actions, as well as our states and feelings; and no reasoning whatever, no theory whatever, and no system of doctrine whatever, can absolve man from his sense of responsibility to his Maker. The view we have been setting forth of the doctrine of Predestination, certainly does not lessen human responsibility, providing as it does for the freedom of man. Man's responsibility depends upon three conditions, viz.: the use of reason, by which he may distinguish truth from error; the possession of conscience, or a moral sense by which he may distinguish right from wrong; and freedom to do what he determines to do. If any one of these conditions be wanting, man is not responsible for his actions. If he is destitute of reason, he is a lunatic; if he is destitute of moral sense, he is not a moral being; if he is not a free agent, he is not responsible for his actions. Predestination does not interfere with any one of these. The only

one it appears to come in contact with, is human freedom; and we have seen, that the accomplishment of God's purpose does not infringe upon the liberty of man. That this is the doctrine of Scripture, is very clear from the event referred to in the text. The death of Christ was foreordained in all its conditions and circumstances, and yet the Jews were none the less responsible for their actions, in crucifying the Lord of glory. Whatever God's secret purpose may be, it must not be understood as in any degree lessening man's responsibility for the actions he performs. The objection that is commonly brought against the doctrine of Predestination, that it deprives man of liberty, and thus destroys his accountability, is precisely the same objection that was brought against Paul's doctrine, and is sometimes stated in the very words of the Apostle: "Why doth He yet find fault, for who hath resisted His will?" If the same objection is levelled against the doctrine of the Apostle, as against ours, it seems reasonable to infer that the doctrines themselves are the same. The Apostle however does not solve the difficulty, but leaves it, as we must do, where we find it.

(4.) *The accomplishment of God's purpose does not interfere with the use of means.*

There is an abuse of this doctrine, very common in the mouths of ignorant men, and which is often stated in this way: "If what is to be, must be, it is no use doing anything, for it cannot be helped." This arises from an entire misunderstanding of the subject. If

that objection is of any weight, it would have the same force in the following case. It is prophesied that "the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea:" "they shall not teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord; for all shall know Me from the least to the greatest," etc. In many similar passages, the universal spread of the gospel is predicted, and all Christian people believe that the prediction will be fulfilled. The universal spread of truth is sure to come, then what is the use of doing anything? But does any one reason in that way? Certainly not. The objection then can be of no validity. Such a doctrine as we have been setting forth, could only discourage the use of means, if it should appear, that every event was determined, independent of all means. But the very reverse is the case; for in foreordaining whatsoever comes to pass, "the liberty or contingency of second causes is not taken away, but rather established." God determines the event as it occurs, viz.: as accomplished through the instrumentality of means. Instead, therefore, of being any discouragement to the use of means, this doctrine affords the best of all encouragements to the use of them. Suppose I am sick, and I am considering whether I should use a certain medicine, which has proved beneficial in cases similar to mine, how do I know but the use of that medicine may be the very means which God has ordained to promote my recovery? and in that confidence, may I not use it,

praying God's blessing on it? And in cases in which we use means, in themselves, utterly inadequate to accomplish the end in view, our only dependence must be in the hope that God may use them for the accomplishment of His own purpose. Suppose that you were deliberating about going to church some Sabbath morning, and you hesitated whether you should go or not; might you not be justified to argue in this way? "Preaching the gospel is the means which God has appointed, for making known the truth and saving men. It is in my power to go where the gospel is preached; how do I know but that God may have purposed, that my going this morning may be the means of saving my soul?" Or, suppose I come into this pulpit with a message to you on some Sabbath morning. I think of the hardness of the human heart, the many appeals it hears unheeded, the difficulty of getting to the heart and the conscience, and of making any permanent impression for good; then I think of the feebleness of the instrument, the imperfect preparation, the apparent inadequacy of the means to accomplish the desired end, and I am discouraged; but then I think again, "this is God's ordinance; this is the means of His appointment; it has pleased God through the foolishness of preaching, to save them that believe; how then do I know, but that God may have a message by me to some poor soul?" and in that confidence and prayer, I go forward to the duty assigned me. Thus it is clear, that the doctrine of Predestination is the best of all encouragements to the use of means.

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Having finished what I intended to say on this subject, I will now close with a few remarks.

(1.) I suppose some among you will now be disposed to ask, Is this the doctrine which is so little understood by some among ourselves, and so much misrepresented, caricatured, and ridiculed by others; and of which some good people seem to have such a horror? Yes, this is the doctrine which some writers high in authority in some branches of the Christian Church, call impious, blasphemous, and absurd; and which others describe in such language as I cannot venture to utter in a pulpit. We simply say, that abuse is not argument, and ridicule is not a test of truth. How this doctrine comes to be so little understood, or rather so much misunderstood—whether from a defect in our teaching, or for want of thought and inquiry on the part of our people, or from the misrepresentations and perversions of others, I would not venture to say; but there is no doubt of the fact, that the subject is not well understood by some among ourselves, much less is it understood by others, and the consequence is, that doctrines are often ascribed to us, that we do not hold at all, but repudiate most sincerely.

(2.) But some one may be disposed to enquire further, are the views which I have set forth in these sermons, the views held by our Church on the doctrine of Predestination. Of course, you must not consider the Church as bound by every utterance of mine on this question, but so far as I am aware, the views I have set

forth, are in the main at least, the views held by our Church. I have quoted the Confession of Faith on the most difficult points, and the views I have set forth are in harmony therewith. Substantially also, so far as I am aware ; the standard writers of our Church, present the doctrine in the same aspect, in which I have endeavoured to present it.

(3.) After a most earnest and careful study of this whole subject, with all the powers which I possess, and with all the light that I have, I feel most thoroughly convinced, that the view of the doctrine held by our Church, and which I have endeavoured to present to you as clearly and as faithfully as I could, is not only Scriptural, but that it is the only one which is in accordance with Scripture teaching, in harmony with sound reason, agreeable to our religious experience, and the only one which corresponds to existing facts. I could not hold any other view, without a violent perversion of the text, and other similar passages. The subject is not of course free from difficulties ; but on the ground we have taken, these difficulties are reduced to the smallest dimensions. In reality, the difficulties are reduced to two insolvable problems—viz. : the existence of sin, and the freedom of the human will. The existence of sin is a fact of experience, and of Scripture teaching ; and if *we* can not explain it, or throw any light on it, with the exalted views we hold of the divine sovereignty, I fancy, that those who profess to dwell most on the divine love and mercy, will not find the

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problem any easier. And in regard to the other difficulty, viz.: the reconciling of human freedom with the control which the Almighty exercises over his creatures, in the accomplishment of His purpose, if *we* do not profess to be able to see just where the human and divine meet and harmonize, I presume that those who put forth greater claims for human freedom, will have still greater difficulty in reconciling the freedom of man, with that control over men, and the actions of men, which, in their prayers at least, they ascribe to Him.

(4.) The view which is held by our Church of this doctrine is best fitted to minister to the comfort of God's children in all the circumstances of life. According to our view of this doctrine, all events whatever are subject to the guidance, and are under the control of a wise and loving Father. There is no chance, or fate in any of those dispensations which affect us in this life, however dark and mysterious they may appear to be. Even when things occur which we have reason to deplore, which bring us nothing but shame and sorrow, we can reflect, that even these could not have occurred without His permission; and however trying they may be to us, He who bringeth good out of evil, may have some wise purpose even in these. Suppose my child is sick, and I send for a physician; he comes, looks at the child, and through sheer carelessness, he gives by mistake some wrong medicine, and the child dies. In this case I reason thus. The physician is certainly to blame, and is responsible for the result; but

for some wise purpose, unknown to me, God has been pleased to permit this to take place; it is in accordance with His all-wise plan, who takes notice of the fall of a sparrow; it is therefore my duty, however trying it may be to me, to submit, saying, "The will of the Lord be done;" but if on the contrary God had no purpose in the matter at all, but merely left it to the will of man to turn the scale, and decide whether my child should live or die, I would be absolutely without any consolation, except what I might derive from blaming the physician. Instead, therefore, of quarrelling with this doctrine of Predestination, we have abundant cause to be thankful for it, as that which ministers not a little to our comfort, in some of the most trying circumstances of life.

(5.) Another thing we should bear in mind is, that in God's government of the world, and in the accomplishment of His own purposes, He does not in any way do violence to the moral nature of His rational creatures. He always deals with men as men; as possessed of reason, conscience and free will, and as being accountable to Him, Whatever may be dark and mysterious to us, in providence and grace, we may be sure, that no practical injustice will be done to us. Though as the rightful sovereign of the universe, He has the right, and He exercises the right, to do as he pleases, yet the judge of all the earth will do right. "Though clouds and darkness are round about Him, righteousness and judgment are the habitation of His throne."

(6.) It is important too that we should remember, that the secret purpose of Jehovah is not our rule of duty, but His will as revealed to us in the Scriptures. Secret things belong unto the Lord, and we have no right to pry into these, but in so far as they are revealed to us, in their actual accomplishment. And should it so happen—as will sometimes be the case—that His secret purpose and His revealed will, may seem to be in conflict, it is no part of our duty to reconcile these; our wisdom is to leave such a matter in the hands of the All-wise, who will in His own good time make all things plain; and humbly and reverently follow His teaching in that Word which He has given to be a light to our feet and a lamp to our path; and which if implicitly followed, will guide us through all the dark and trying dispensations of this world, to that world, where all is light, and joy, and love.

(7.) However important it may be for us to have correct and Scriptural views of this, and every other doctrine that God has revealed; and however accurate our knowledge may be of the deeper mysteries of our holy religion; and however consistent our theoretical views may be with the teaching of Scripture, and however systematic our scheme of doctrine may be, it will avail us little, if we neglect those plainer and simpler truths, which God has revealed for our salvation. And while it is our duty to search the Scriptures, and grasp, if we can, the whole system of truth, and harmonize the different parts as we best may, it is the plain and

simple truths of the gospel especially, that must nourish our faith, and not the deeper mysteries of the divine decrees. And, surely, when there is so much that is above and beyond us, we cannot be too thankful, that what concerns our souls' salvation is so plain, that the wayfaring man, though a fool, need not err therein. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."

(8.) Lastly. The doctrine of Predestination, contemplated in its wider range, as affecting the eternal destiny of men, obviously includes the particular doctrine of election to eternal glory ; yet, as is clear from the views we have set forth, it leaves intact all the motives and influences brought to bear in the gospel ; it does not interfere in the least with the precepts and promises, the warnings and threatenings, the exhortations and invitations of the divine Word. It leaves man in the enjoyment of his freedom, and it detracts nothing from all the motives by which he is urged to flee from the wrath to come. It leaves none an excuse for inaction, and furnishes no man with a plea for neglect of his soul's salvation. It does not weaken the exhortation, "Now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation ;" and it does not invalidate the important truth, "He that believeth on the Son, hath everlasting life ; and he that believeth not the Son, shall not see life ; but the wrath of God abideth on him."

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